

**It Only Takes One  
First Word**  
*By Dick Dusharme*

One good customer-service experience can turn you around.

Very often in this space (but mostly in my grouchy boss's "Last Word" column) you read horror stories about poor customer service. It often takes only one or two bad experiences to make us never want to visit a business again – unless we really need to.

But as important as it is for business owners to recognize the customer-losing effect of poor service, it's just as important to realize the flip side: A positive customer experience can turn around, or at least dramatically soften, the effect of a poor one.

I live in a relatively small city and if I need specialty computer supplies, I need to drive about 30 minutes to reach a store handling computers, peripherals and supplies. In the past, my experience at that store was rarely good. It usually took forever to find someone to help me, the clerks seemed bored and I once had a problem returning an item I had just purchased (the manager wasn't happy that the manufacturer told me I should return the product to the store). So I put that store on my "do not visit" list and went anywhere else to avoid shopping there.

A couple of weeks ago, however, I needed a particular kind of paper for my Epson inkjet printer. The local Staples didn't have it but I knew that CompUSA did. So I tightened my belt and headed over there.

I walked into the store, quickly located what I needed and headed over to the checkout stand. As usual, I picked the wrong line. It was the shortest at the time but the person in front of me was experiencing some complex problem that required the help of two clerks, the manager and, I think, a call to CompUSA CEO Larry Mondry.

In the meantime, the adjacent checker quickly rang up everyone in his line. He was just ringing up his last customer when the manager told him to take his lunch break.

The checker finished with his customer, but rather than take his break, he motioned me over.

"I'll take you," he said. "I see you've been standing there for a long time."

So I darted over and dumped my two items onto the counter. "This will only take a minute, right? No need for you to wait," he said with a smile.

"Bob, you gotta take your lunch," his boss repeated.

"OK, right after this guy; he's been waiting for awhile," Bob called over his shoulder. I thought I actually saw his eyes roll.

I declare, I actually felt all warm and fuzzy there for a second. Not only did Bob take the initiative to serve me when he didn't have to, he did it after his boss had told him to do something else. A man after my own heart!

Two events actually happened there. The first was that Bob was aware of what was going on at a check stand other than his. The second was that the environment was such that he felt comfortable ignoring his boss's order to take lunch in order to do something more important . . . serve me.

Did all this suddenly make me love CompUSA? Not completely, no. However, it did soften my view and make me more willing to go back.

It only takes one.

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